

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 3878

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINR, VE
SUBJECT: MIDDLE EAST VISIT OF VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT PEREZ

REF: CARACAS 2983, JIDDA 2712

1. FOLLOWING IS BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON PRESIDENT
CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ AND VENEZUELAN LEADERS SCHEDULED
TO VISIT IRAQ, IRAN, KUWAIT, SAUDI ARABIA, QATAR AND
AUSTRIA, APRIL 20 - MAY 4.

2. PRESIDENT CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ WAS BORN ON OCTOBER
27, 1922 IN RUBIO IN THE ANDEAN STATE OF TACHIRA NEAR
THE COLOMBIAN BORDER. HIS FATHER WAS A SMALL COFFEE
GROWER. HIS EARLY EDUCATION WAS CARRIED OUT IN HIS
HOME TOWN AND HE COMPLETED HIGH SCHOOL IN CARACAS.
HE STUDIED LAW FOR THREE YEARS AT THE CENTRAL
UNIVERSITY OF VENEZUELA AND LATER COMPLETED TWO YEARS
ADDITIONAL STUDY IN COLOMBIA AND COSTA RICA WHILE IN
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EXILE. LIKE MANY OF VENEZUELA'S PRESENT LEADERS,
PEREZ BEGAN HIS POLITICAL CAREER AT AN EARLY AGE.
AT 15 HE WAS A CELL ORGANIZER FOR THE NATIONAL
DEMOCRATIC PARTY, A FORERUNNER OF ACCION DEMOCRATICA
(AD), AND AT 19 HE ATTENDED AD'S FIRST NATIONAL CON-
VENTION AS A YOUTH LEADER. FOLLOWING THE OVERTHROW
OF THE MILITARY DICTATORSHIP IN 1945, PEREZ WAS

PRIVATE SECRETARY TO ROMULO BETANCOURT, PRESIDENT OF THE REVOLUTIONARY JUNTA. ELECTED TO CONGRESS IN 1947, PEREZ WAS IMPRISONED FOLLOWING THE MILITARY COUP OF 1948. PEREZ WAS EXILED THE FOLLOWING YEAR AND DURING THE NEXT NINE YEARS HE SPENT PERIODS IN COLOMBIA, CUBA, AND COSTA RICA UNTIL THE FALL OF THE PEREZ JIMENEZ DICTATORSHIP IN JANUARY 1958. PEREZ RETURNED TO VENEZUELA AND WON ELECTION TO CONGRESS IN THAT YEAR'S ELECTION. AS PRESIDENT BETANCOURT'S INTERIOR MINISTER FROM 1962 TO 1963 DURING THE HEIGHT OF THE GUERRILLA UPRISING, PEREZ EARNED THE REPUTATION OF A STRONGMAN. REELECTED TO CONGRESS IN 1963 AND AGAIN IN 1968, PEREZ WAS AD SECRETARY GENERAL FROM 1968 TO 1972. PEREZ BECAME AD'S CANDIDATE FOR THE PRESIDENCY IN 1972 AND, AFTER A HECTIC 16-MONTH CAMPAIGN, WAS ELECTED PRESIDENT ON DECEMBER 9, 1973 WITH 48 PERCENT OF THE VOTE. PEREZ, IN KEEPING WITH HIS CAMPAIGN SLOGAN "DEMOCRACY WITH ENERGY", HAS BEEN AN EXTREMELY ACTIVE PRESIDENT. HIGHLIGHTS OF HIS PRESIDENCY HAVE INCLUDED THE NATIONALIZATION OF THE IRON MINING INDUSTRY ON JANUARY 1, 1975, THE NATIONALIZATION OF THE PETROLEUM INDUSTRY AT THE BEGINNING OF 1976, AND HIS EIGHT-NATION TRIP ABROAD IN NOVEMBER 1976 WHICH INCLUDED VISITS TO THE SOVIET UNION AND GREAT BRITAIN AS WELL AS THE FIRST SPEECH BY A VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT AT THE UNITED NATIONS. A BELIEVER IN THE BOLIVARIAN GOAL OF LATIN UNITY, PEREZ HAS BEEN ACTIVE IN THE CAUSE OF LATIN AMERICAN INTEGRATION. OTHER INTERESTS INCLUDE THE DEFENSE OF OPEC OIL PRICES, A SUCCESSFUL

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CONCLUSION TO THE CIEC IN PARIS, AND A NEW PANAMA CANAL TREATY. PEREZ' IDENTIFICATION WITH THE THIRD WORLD IS GENUINE AND HIS AMBITIOUS FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES VERY MUCH REFLECT HIS PERSONALITY. PRESIDENT PEREZ WORKS VERY HARD. HE ARRIVES AT HIS MIRAFLORES PALACE OFFICE EARLY AND STAYS LATE. A BELIEVER IN PHYSICAL FITNESS, HE CULTIVATES AN IMAGE OF ENERGY AND ACTION. ERECT, TOUGH, VIRILE, AND DECISIVE, PEREZ HAS A GOOD SENSE OF HUMOR AND ENJOYS ANECDOTES. HE IS A FRIENDLY MAN WHO ENJOYS MEETING PEOPLE; HIS CONVERSATIONAL STYLE IS FRANK AND DIRECT. PRESIDENT PEREZ IS MARRIED TO THE FORMER BLANCA (BLANQUITA) RODRIGUEZ; THEY HAVE SIX CHILDREN RANGING IN AGE FROM 26 TO 13. IN ADDITION TO HIS NATIVE SPANISH, PEREZ HAS STUDIED ENGLISH ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS.

3. INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC AFFAIRS MINISTER MANUEL PEREZ GUERRERO, 65 YEARS OLD, HAS SERVED IN PRESIDENT PEREZ' CABINET SINCE THE BEGINNING OF HIS ADMINISTRATION IN MARCH 1974. ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL CABINET MINIS-

TERS, PEREZ GUERRERO ENJOYS DIRECT ACCESS TO PRESIDENT PEREZ AND IS THE SINGLE DOMINANT FORCE IN THE SHAPING OF VENEZUELAN INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC POLICY. VERY INTELLIGENT, EXPERIENCED AND A MASTER OF BUREAUCRATIC MANEUVER, PEREZ GUERRERO IS CO-CHAIRMAN OF CIEC AND A FIRM SUPPORTER OF THIRD WORLD ASPIRATIONS.

4. FIFTY-ONE YEAR OLD ENERGY AND MINES MINISTER VALENTIN HERNANDEZ ACOSTA IS A WORKAHOLIC WHO COMBINES A 12-14 HOUR DAY WITH AN UNPRETENTIOUS LIFE-STYLE. A FORMER DIPLOMAT AND WELL-KNOWN IN THE ARAB WORLD DUE TO FORMER CONTACTS WITH OPEC, HERNANDEZ IS ONE OF PEREZ' CLOSEST ECONOMIC ADVISORS. HERNANDEZ SUCCESSFULLY MANAGED THE DIFFICULT PETROLEUM NATIONALIZATION PROCESS IN 1975 WITHOUT ALIENATING THE INTERNATIONAL OIL COMPANIES.

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5. THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, RAMON ESCOVAR SALOM IS SHORT, FLIGHTY AND CONSEQUENTLY UNPREDICTABLE. FIFTY YEARS OLD, ESCOVAR TENDS TO BE POMPOUS AND IS NOT PARTICULARLY POPULAR WITHIN THE GOV. ALTHOUGH HIGHLY AMBITIOUS, ESCOVAR IS NEITHER A POLICY MAKER NOR A GREAT INFLUENCE ON PRESIDENT PEREZ.

6. FINANCE MINISTER HECTOR HURTADO, 58, IS PRACTICAL AND PRAGMATIC, THOUGH NOT PARTICULARLY INTELLECTUAL. A NATIONALIST, HE HAS LONG BEEN THE GOV'S LEADING SPOKESMAN FOR STATE PARTICIPATION IN THE INDUSTRIAL SECTOR. HURTADO IS A STRONG ADMINISTRATOR AND, LIKE PEREZ GUERRERO, HAS BEEN IN PEREZ' CABINET SINCE THE BEGINNING OF HIS ADMINISTRATION.

7. CARMELO LAURIA LESSEUR, BASIC INDUSTRIES MINISTER, IS 40 YEARS OLD AND A BANKER BY PROFESSION. HE SERVES AS A DOMESTIC ECONOMIC TROUBLESHOOTER FOR PEREZ. A FORCEFUL PERSONALITY, LAURIA ACTS AS AN ADVISOR AND INTERLOCUTOR WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR.

8. RETIRED ARMY GENERAL RAFAEL ALFONZO RAVARD WAS APPOINTED IN 1975 AS PRESIDENT OF PETROLEOS DE VENEZUELA (PETROVEN), THE STATE OIL COMPANY, DUE TO HIS REPUTATION AS THE BEST ADMINISTRATOR IN VENEZUELA. HARD WORKING AND HONEST, ALFONZO FOR 20 YEARS SUCCESSFULLY DIRECTED THE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT OF VENEZUELA'S GUAYANA REGION. AT AGE 67, ALFONZO IS A RESPECTED EXPERT IN HIS FIELD, BUT NOT, PROBABLY, A DIRECT INFLUENCE ON ECONOMIC OR POLITICAL POLICY.

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